

FROM THE BOOKSHELF NO. 148  
CHARLES MEDD

JULY 6, 1976

"THE KILLER ANGELS" BY MICHAEL SHAARA

ANNCR: THE VOICE OF AMERICA NOW BRINGS YOU ANOTHER IN THE WEEKLY SERIES FROM THE BOOKSHELF -- A SERIES IN WHICH WE REPORT ON BOOKS AMERICANS ARE READING. TODAY, CHARLES MEDD'S REVIEW OF "KILLER ANGELS", A PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING NOVEL ABOUT THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG, PUBLISHED IN 1975 BY THE DAVID MCKAY COMPANY. HERE IS YOUR BOOK EDITOR\_\_\_\_\_.

EDITOR: IT WAS AT CEREMONIES DEDICATING A NATIONAL CEMETARY AT GETTYSBURG THAT ABRAHAM LINCOLN GAVE ONE OF THE MOST INSPIRED STATEMENTS EVER DELIVERED IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE. IN HIS TWO-MINUTE SPEECH, LINCOLN PREDICTED THAT "THE WORLD WILL LITTLE NOTE NOR LONG REMEMBER" WHAT HE WAS SAYING, BUT RATHER WHAT THE MEN WHO DIED THERE HAD DONE TO PRESERVE "GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE (AND) FOR THE PEOPLE." THE FACT IS, HOWEVER, THAT THE WORDS OF LINCOLN ARE PERHAPS BETTER REMEMBERED THAN WHAT HAPPENED AT GETTYSBURG THOSE FIRST THREE DAYS OF JULY, 1863.

IT WAS DURING THAT BRIEF PERIOD THAT TWO ARMIES MET, MORE OR LESS BY CHANCE, AND FOUGHT THE BLOODIEST AND WHAT MAY HAVE BEEN THE MOST IMPORTANT BATTLE EVER WAGED ON AMERICAN SOIL. IT WAS THERE THAT SOUTHERN TROOPS, COMMANDED BY GENERAL ROBERT E. LEE, WERE STOPPED IN THEIR DEEPEST PENETRATION OF THE NORTH IN WHAT BECAME A VITAL TURNING POINT IN THE CIVIL WAR. THE CONFLICT, MARKED BY HEROISM AND TACTICAL ERRORS ON BOTH SIDES, HAS LONG FASCINATED MILITARY HISTORIANS. BUT IT WAS FOR THE AVERAGE READER

EDITOR: THAT NOVELIST MICHAEL SHAARA WROTE A FICTIONAL VERSION,  
(CONT'D) BASED ON OFFICIAL AND PERSONAL ACCOUNTS OF THE BATTLE,  
TO TELL IN HIS WORDS "WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO BE THERE."  
HIS CHARACTERS ARE BASED ON REAL HISTORICAL PERSONS.  
AS WITH ALL GREAT STRUGGLES, GETTYSBURG HAD ITS SHARE OF  
HEROES AND FOOLS, AND THEY WERE FOUND IN BOTH CAMPS. IN  
AUTHOR SHAARA'S BOOK, "THE KILLER ANGELS", TWO HEROES  
STAND OUT: LIEUTENANT GENERAL JAMES LONGSTREET, IN REAL  
LIFE AS WELL AS IN THIS NOVEL, A FULL-BEARDED, SLOW-TALKING  
PROFESSIONAL SOLDIER WAS ON THE SOUTHERN SIDE. HE CORRECTLY  
BELIEVED THAT GETTYSBURG WAS THE WRONG PLACE AND THE WRONG  
TIME FOR THE REBEL ARMY TO DO BATTLE. THE OTHER ANGEL IS  
COLONEL LAWRENCE CHAMBERLAIN, A PROFESSOR OF RHETORIC AT  
BOVDON COLLEGE IN HIS NATIVE STATE OF MAINE, A VOLUNTEER  
SOLDIER WHO EARNED INSTANT FAME FOR HIS DEFENSE OF BIG  
ROUND TOP HILL. HE GIVES THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE UNION  
NORTH.

IT WAS CHAMBERLAIN WHO LED HIS BATTERED INFANTRY REGIMENT  
DOWN THE SLOPES OF BIG ROUND TOP IN ONE OF THE NORTH'S  
FIRST SUCCESSFUL COUNTER-ATTACKS OF THE WAR. WITH THE  
SOUTHERN LINES BREAKING IN FULL RETREAT, AUTHOR SHAARA  
DESCRIBES THE MAN FROM MAINE:

VOICE: "HE MOVED FORWARD AND BEGAN TO CLIMB THE HILL IN THE  
DARK. AS HE WALKED HE FORGOT HIS PAIN; HIS HEART  
BEGAN TO BEAT QUICKLY, AND HE FELT AN INCREDIBLE JOY.  
HE LOOKED AT HIMSELF, WONDERINGLY, AT THE BELOVED MEN  
AROUND HIM, AND HE SAID TO HIMSELF: LAWRENCE, OLD SON,  
TREASURE THIS MOMENT, BECAUSE YOU FEEL AS GOOD AS A MAN  
CAN FEEL."

EDITOR: COLONEL CHAMBERLAIN WAS AN IDEALIST WHO SAW THE CIVIL  
WAR AS A MORAL CRUSADE AGAINST THE EVILS OF SLAVERY.  
MOST OF HIS SOUTHERN COUNTERPARTS, HOWEVER, SAW THE  
WAR IN DIFFERENT TERMS -- AS A STRUGGLE AGAINST WHAT  
THEY CALLED NORTHERN TYRANNY. UNTIL GETTYSBURG, MOST  
OF THE MAJOR BATTLES HAD BEEN WON BY THE REBELS, ALL  
OF THEM WITHIN SOUTHERN BOUNDARIES. GETTYSBURG, A SMALL  
PENNSYLVANIA FARM VILLAGE SOME EIGHTY KILOMETERS NORTH  
OF WASHINGTON, WAS THE SOUTH'S FIRST AND ONLY MAJOR  
OFFENSIVE INTO ENEMY TERRITORY.

THE SOUTHERN FORCES A CONFIDENT ARMY OF SEVENTY-FIVE  
THOUSAND MEN--WERE LED BY THE GIFTED AND MUCH-RESPECTED  
GENERAL ROBERT E. LEE. THREE DAYS OF FIGHTING WOULD  
COST THE SOUTH ABOUT ONE-THIRD OF ITS INVADING TROOPS.

DURING THE FIRST CRITICAL DAY AT GETTYSBURG, AS THE  
REBEL ATTACK ON BIG ROUND TOP WAS BEING REPULSED,  
GENERAL LEE WAITED IN A GROVE, "LISTENING TO THE ENORMOUS  
SOUND OF WAR:". MICHAEL SHAARA SETS THE SCENE:

VOICE: "HE TOOK OFF HIS HAT, RAN HIS FINGERS THROUGH HIS HAIR,  
FELT HIS LIFE BEATING IN HIS CHEST. THE FIGHT WENT ON.  
LEE THOUGHT FOR THE FIRST TIME THAT DAY OF HIS SON,  
ROONEY, WOUNDED, LYING NOT FAR FROM HERE. HE CLOSED  
HIS EYES, PRAYED FOR HIS BOY, FOR ALL OF THEM. HE PUT  
HIS HAND DOWN ON BLACK DIRT, WAS REMINDED: PENNSYLVANIA.  
I AM THE INVADER."

EDITOR: THE ONE MAN WHO HAD SPOKEN OUT AGAINST THE ENCOUNTER AT  
GETTYSBURG WAS LEE'S CLOSEST AIDE, JAMES LONGSTREET.

EDITOR: THIS BIG, BROODING PROFESSIONAL HAD MADE HIS REPUTATION  
(CONT'D) AS A DEFENSIVE SPECIALIST, AND HE URGED HIS COMMANDING  
OFFICER TIME AND AGAIN TO DIRECT HIS FORCES TO THE  
SOUTH, TOWARD WASHINGTON. ON THE THIRD DAY, LEE WAS  
DETERMINED TO CRACK THE NORTHERN LINES AT THEIR CENTER,  
AND LONGSTREET TRIED UNTIL THE LAST MOMENT TO DISSUADE  
HIM, EVEN TO THE POINT OF PROVOKING LEE'S ANGER.

VOICE: "LEE TURNED AND LOOKED AT HIM, BUT THERE WAS A DIFFERENCE  
IN THE FACE NOW; THE WEARINESS WAS SUDDENLY APPARENT.  
THE OLD MAN HAD LOST CONTROL FOR A MOMENT AND THE PAIN  
WAS THERE; THE EXHAUSTION DULLED THE EYES. LONGSTREET  
FELT A SURGE OF EMOTION, HE WANTED TO REACH OUT AND TOUCH  
THE OLD MAN, BUT THAT WAS IMPOSSIBLE. YOU COULD NOT SHOW  
AFFECTION HERE, NO PLACE FOR IT HERE, TOO MANY MEN WILL  
DIE."

SUMMING UP THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG, WINSTON CHURCHILL  
WROTE: "THUS ENDED THE GREAT AMERICAN CIVIL WAR, WHICH  
MUST UPON THE WHOLE BE CONSIDERED THE NOBLEST AND LEAST  
AVOIDABLE CONFLICTS OF WHICH TILL THEN THERE WAS RECORD."

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MOST HISTORIANS AGREE THAT THIS CRITICAL BATTLE WAS INDEED  
UNAVOIDABLE, THAT HAD THESE TWO ARMIES NOT MET AT  
GETTYSBURG A SIMILAR SETTING WOULD HAVE BEEN FOUND. THAT  
BOTH SIDES FOUGHT BRAVELY AND NOBLY WAS ALSO KNOWN TO THE  
HISTORIANS, AND NOW -- WITH MICHAEL SHAARA'S SUPERBLY  
CRAFTED NOVEL -- MUCH OF THE NOBILITY BECOMES CLEAR TO  
THE REST OF US.

ANNCR: YOU HAVE BEEN LISTENING TO A REPORT ON MICHAEL SHAARA'S  
NOVEL THE KILLER ANGELS. AND NOW AN INVITATION TO JOIN  
US NEXT WEEK (AT THIS TIME) FOR ANOTHER IN OUR SERIES OF  
REPORTS ON BOOKS AMERICANS ARE CHOOSING ... FROM THE  
BOOKSHELF.

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